

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

March 18, 2005

The Week Ahead

Wed., March 23 – The Commissioner attends an adoption celebration for the East region. She also speaks at “Social Work Career Day” at East Tennessee State University.

Thurs., March 24 – The Commissioner speaks at the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth’s Children’s Advocacy Days in Nashville. She also speaks to the Chattanooga Rotary Club at an event later that day.

DCS Employee News

If you have employee news that you would like to share with the department, please send information to public information officer K. Danielle Edwards at K.Danielle.Edwards@state.tn.us. Suggested submissions include regional or county DCS news, retirements, promotions, awards, client successes and more.

Employee Recognized as “Social Worker of the Year”

Submitted by Mary Duke, case manager 4/team leader for the foster care units in Chester, Henderson and Decatur counties

Blanche W. Dyer, affectionately known as “Miss Winnie”, was employed on February 15, 1988, as a community services assistant in the Lexington, Tenn. office. Over the past 17 years, she has experienced and become the leading bond between families and children in her service area. She is always happy, friendly, smiling and wishing wonderful things for everyone. She often hums songs of faith and provides such a pleasant atmosphere to be around.

On March 7, 2005, Dyer was recognized as the Southwest region’s “Social Worker of the Year”. She was awarded a \$250 cash award and plaque. Staff members describe her loving, compassionate, caring, willing to help, dependable and a truly genuine friend.

Oftentimes, staff does not see Dyer; she spends much of her time on the road. She takes children to counseling, visits and evaluations, or just to the park to play. The children describe “Miss Winnie” as a loving friend and grandmother figure. When times are tough for children, she is the first person to offer her shoulder for the tears and words

of strength and love. She works so well with all the staff that has been lucky enough to have her on their team, and her powers of observation and ability to communicate these observations to the families' staff have sometimes been key in determining if the family's team was being successful.

Probably one of the most profound moments came, when Dyer assisted a worker with telling a birth parent that her medically fragile child had passed away, after a very long illness. The parent was mentally challenged and Dyer had such a connection to the mother that it made delivering the sad news much less traumatic for everyone. During the time of burial preparation and services, Dyer remained with the mother as a source of strength and encouragement. She never once faltered in her undying compassion for the mother and the child. She can do what many cannot do, genuinely connect to others.

A retirement party has been planned for Dyer on March 30 from 2-4 p.m. at the Henderson County DCS office in Lexington. Your attendance would be greatly appreciated. If you wish to send a congratulatory e-mail, please submit them to Mary.Duke@state.tn.us.

Independent Living Youth Selected for Congressional Internship

Christopher Angelin, a social work major at Southern Adventist University, has been selected for a coveted internship with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI). The competitive internship program selects 14-16 "hard-working, independent and academically successful" students from across the country to spend six weeks in the Washington, D.C. offices of Congress members.

The internship is sponsored by CCAI and made possible through a grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. CCAI works closely with Congressional staff to ensure that former foster children have an opportunity to work on Capitol Hill.

While in the nation's capital, Angelin will attend committee hearings and press conferences, work directly with legislative correspondents and legislative assistants to research issues and compose correspondence, attend and serve at Congressional meetings and hearings, answer inquiries and much more.

Below is an excerpt from Angelin's essay that he submitted as part of his application packet.

My sisters and I were headed down the road in the back of a State of Tennessee car with our futures unknown. We had decided to run away from our home and lives because it was simply more than we could handle. The abuse had come to a climax and we were tired of hiding the outward cuts, as well as the inward bruises, due to the severe abuse we had endured the past four years. The three of us had been abused in all ways by a father who blamed his guilt on us, who lacked a conscience, and who simply did not care

anything about us. He lived to make us hurt, or so it seemed. We made arrangements for my youngest sister to tell it all to the school counselor and we knew we would be safe afterwards. Sure thing, the state came to our rescue and we were on our way to *foster care*.

According to the *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, “nearly one million children enter the foster care system each year” (76). Most of these children ¹ have been abused or neglected or were in homes with parents who used drugs and alcohol or had mental impairments. With children from such backgrounds entering foster homes everyday, it is imperative foster parents are able to properly care for foster children who have their own damage physically, but more important, mentally. The increasing numbers of children in foster homes with mental disorders and backgrounds of abuse is evidence enough to prove that foster parents should advance their training to create therapeutic foster homes. Therapeutic training will increase foster parents’ pay, improve the child’s well-being, and positively affect the society around the child ...

Foster parents in America today desperately need more funding so that they can ensure that each foster child receives proper care. Increased training is just what foster parents need in order to qualify for more funding. The cost of living these days is rising higher and higher while foster parents’ pay is becoming less and less adequate to meet children’s needs. According to studies conducted by Kathy Barbell, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) director for foster care, 22 percent of the nation’s foster parents leave due to economics. The average level-one foster parent across the board receives only \$329 per month for a two-year old child while the actual expenditures amount to \$6,870 per year, or \$572 per month.

These statistics are sobering when compared to that of a therapeutic foster home. In the same article, Barbell tells us that therapeutic foster parents receive a minimum of \$940 per month per child, almost three times as much as level-one foster parents (Barbell). While the cost of living remains the same, the extra money is provided for the wear and tear of the foster parent’s home, automobile(s), as well as their personal well-being. More funding is more attractive as well. The states would not have as hard a time finding people to open up their homes if more funds were available. There is no better way to increase funds than to advance foster parents training.

Core Leadership

There was no Core Leadership meeting this week. The next Core Leadership meeting will be held Tuesday, March 22.



Children are apt to live up to what you believe of them. – Lady Bird Johnson

Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another; it is the only means. – Albert Einstein